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The Brownings and America

By

ELIZABETH PORTER GOULD

Author of "One's Self I Sing and Other Poems;" "Anne Gilchrist and Walt Whitman;" "John Adams and Daniel Webster as Schoolmasters;" "Ezekiel Cheever: Schoolmaster," "A Pioneer Doctor: A Story of the Seventies," etc.

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The Brownings and America

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THE BROWNINGS AND AMERICA

FROM the first of their literary career, America not only honored the Brownings, but the Brownings honored America. At an early age Mrs. Browning, as Elizabeth Barrett, had read Paine's *Age of Reason,* and in her *Essay on Mind,* published in 1826, had referred in the *Rights of Man* to his argument in the throne's defense instead of against monarchy. In the same *Essay* she had referred to Washington Irving as striking "Pierian chords." But when Edgar Allan Poe dedicated to her his little volume of thirty poems, "The Raven and other Poems; New York; Wiley and Putnam: 1845," her interest naturally became more personal. She fully appreciated the dedicatory words:

"To the Noblest of her Sex — To the Author of 'The Drama of Exile' — To Miss Elizabeth Barrett Barrett of England, I dedicate this Volume, with the most Enthusiastic Admiration, and with the most Sincere Esteem — E. A. P."

Receiving such seemed to her, as she wrote in reply (April, 1846), "to authorize or, at least, to encourage" her to try to express what she had long felt, her sense of the high honor he had done her in his country and hers, in the dedication of his poems. "It is too great a distinction," she continues, "conferred by a hand of too liberal generosity. I wish for my own sake I were worthy of it. But I may endeavor, by future work, to justify a little what I cannot deserve anywise now. For it, meanwhile, I may be grateful, because gratitude is the virtue of the humblest." After this "imperfect acknowledgment" of her personal obligation, she goes on to thank him, as another reader would thank him, for this "vivid writing, this power which is felt! Your Raven," she declares, "has produced a sensation, a 'fit horror' here in England. Some of my friends are taken by the fear of it and some by the music. I hear of persons haunted by the 'Nevermore,' and one acquaintance of mine who has the misfortune of possessing a bust of Pallas never can bear to look at it in the twilight." She then tells that "our great poet, Mr. Browning,

the author of 'Paracelsus' and the 'Bells and Pomegranates,' was struck much by the rhythm of that poem."

From four different quarters, besides from the author himself, she had received the *Raven* when it had only a newspaper life. But though it had for her an "uncommon voice and effect," she could not feel "the immoderate joy" her friend John Kenyon felt upon reading it. "It is the rhythm which has taken him with glamour, I fancy." This, as she wrote Mr. Horne in May, 1845, "acted excellently upon the imagination, the 'Nevermore' having a solemn chime;" yet the poem did not seem to her to be the "natural expression of a sane intellect in whatever mood." She thought this should be specified in its title. She felt that some of the lyrics had power of a "less questionable sort." She even declared that Poe showed more faculty in his account of that horrible mesmeric experience (mad or not mad) than in his poems. This tale of mesmerism (*The Case of M. Valdemar*) which she wrote him she did not find in the dedicatory volume, but which was going the round of the newspapers, was

throwing them all into "most admired disorder" and "dreadful doubts as to whether it could be true, as the children said of ghost stories." But she had to confess to the "power of the writer, and the faculty he had of making horrible improbabilities seem near and familiar."

While Miss Barrett was reading Poe's works he was reading hers; for about this time his friend Mrs. Frances S. Osgood, in sending the English poet a volume of her *Poems* from America, wrote that she ought to come to New York "only to see Mr. Poe's wild eyes flash through tears," when he read her verses. Could she then have entered the little Fordham cottage where the loved young wife Virginia was slowly dying she would have seen among the books on the little hanging bookshelf hers and Mr. Browning's holding posts of honor; and she would have seen the "quiet exultation" with which Poe drew from his pocket to read to a friend who tells it the letter he had received from Miss Barrett. It would have rejoiced his sensitive heart could he have heard years later (1851) the conversation between the Brownings and his literary friend

John R. Thompson when they declared they had formed "an ardent and just admiration" of the author of *The Raven,* and felt a "strong desire to see his memory vindicated from moral aspersion." (Harrison's Life of Poe.)

Not only the American poets, but the American magazines and papers, early appreciated this gifted woman's work; notably the *Arcturus,* a New York journal edited by Cornelius Mathews and Evert A. Duyckinck (February, 1841); the *North American Review* of July, 1842; *Graham's Magazine* of December, 1842; *Democratic Review* of July and October, 1844; and the *Evening Mirror* of December 7, 1844.

The writer in the *North American Review,* in taking up the three publications she, as Miss Barrett, had then published,* began by confessing ignorance of the author as "to her lineage, education, tastes, and (last and not least where a lady is concerned) her personal attractions."

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* *An Essay on Mind,* with other Poems, London, 1826; *Prometheus Bound,* translated from the Greek of Æschylus, and Miscellaneous Poems by the Translator. London, 1833; *The Seraphim,* and other Poems. London, 1838.

But he revealed a Yankee shrewdness which must have amused the author when he stated that the solitary fact he was able to gather from her poetry was — her age; for learning on good authority that her first volume was published at the age of seventeen, a guess might be given as to result. After sixteen pages of remarks on the poems, several of which he copied, he took leave of Miss Barrett with "a sincere admiration of her genius, her learning, and the tone of moral and religious feeling which elevates and sanctifies poetry." If he had spoken plainly of her faults it was "because she could bear it." She had "great gifts," and could do "better things than she had yet done, if she would chastise the lawless extravagance of her genius, beget in the whirlwind of her inspiration a temperance that shall give it smoothness, and let in the light of day upon those mazy and mystic labyrinths of thought in which she delights to lose herself and bewilder her readers. Her faults are excesses and not defects, overflowings and not shortcomings, the wild futility of a too luxuriant, and not the hunger-bitten poverty of a meagre soul. Let her re-

member that extravagance is not power, that to be obscure is not to be profound; to be mystical is not to be sublime; and that genius in its highest flight of ecstasy with all its robes and singing garlands about it must be guided and controlled by a law as unslumbering and unerring as that which brings back the far depths of infinite space."

This critic's condemnation of *The Seraphim* was all Miss Barrett referred to in sending the magazine to her friend and correspondent, Mr. Hugh Stuart Boyd. "It seems to me," she wrote, "it is not too hard. The poem wants unity." In her *Preface* to it, she had declared that she assumed "no power of art except that power of love towards it which had remained with her from childhood's days." Without "disparaging speeches, and yet with a self-distrust amounting to emotion," she had offered her poetry to the public, and for the first time in her own name, not "because there was a public, but because it was thought and felt." She hoped to write better verses — but she never could "feel more intensely than at that moment the sub-

lime uses of poetry and the solemn responsibilities of the poet."

Her confession later (August, 1844), that the Americans, and perhaps she herself, were of the opinion that she had made great progress since *The Seraphim* was written ("It seems to me that I have more *reach* whether as thought or language") may have led her unsigned critic of the *North American Review* to feel that he had possibly had a share in the progress. Who knows?

The *Democratic Review*, of July, 1844, in complimenting her, declared that her poems "generated the sweetest union of womanly tenderness of heart and masculine loftiness and power of intellect." It compared her to Mrs. Norton.

The review in the Editor's Table of the *Graham's Magazine* called her the "learned poetess of the day," and declared her "productions unique in this age of lady authors. They have the touch of nature in common with the best; they have, too, sentiment, passion, and fancy in the highest degree without reminding us of Mrs. Hemans, Mrs. Norton, or L. E. L." Like the *North American Review*, it copied entire the

poem *The Sleep, Cowper's Grave,* and several others. In sending the magazine to Mr. Boyd (January, 1843) she wrote that "however extravagant" the review was in its appreciation, she felt it would give "his kindness pleasure. I confess," she adds, "to a good deal of pleasure myself from these American courtesies, expressed not merely in the magazines but in the newspapers." She tells of receiving a magazine from America containing *The Cry of the Human,* which a correspondent told her was considered there "one of her most successful poems." She doubts whether he would think so. "But tell me exactly what you do think?" she asks. Her faith in the opinions of this learned, blind friend is noticeable through all the correspondence. "Here was the daughter that Milton should have had!" exclaims Edmund Clarence Stedman in his *Victorian Poets.*

In her letters she refers to the American papers sent her — the *New York Tribune, The Union, The Union Flag* — as being "scattered over with extracts from her books, and benignant words about their author."

The *Graham's Magazine,* which contained the review above mentioned, had, under the title *Sonnets,* the four we now know as *Grief, Superstition, Work,* and *Work and Contemplation.* For these she received fifty dollars. They had been sent to *Arcturus,* but having arrived after the discontinuance of that periodical, its editors had sent them to *Graham's,* thinking that the "good company into which they would be introduced there would be every way agreeable to the fair authoress." The following year (1843) appeared in different issues of the magazine her *Caterina to Camoens, Seraph and Poet, The Soul's Expression,* and *The Child and the Watcher.* In 1844 appeared *Loved Once, The Lady's Yes,* and *Pain in Pleasure.* The last was signed E. B. B., the others *Elizabeth B. Barrett.* The year before (1843) had appeared in *The Pioneer,* the short-lived periodical edited by James Russell Lowell and Robert Carter, *The Maiden's Death,* a poem of thirty-four lines. Lowell, in referring to this, wrote to a friend, "She promises more in a very pleasant letter."

The various requests from the United States for contributions from her pen led the poet to feel, as she wrote Mr. Boyd, that the Americans were "as good-natured to her as if they took her for the high Radical" she was. Upon receiving in April, 1845, a letter from "a poet in Massachusetts and another from a poetess; — the *he* Mr. Lowell, the *she* Mrs. Sigourney," she confessed to her blind friend that "the sound of my poetry is stirring the deep green forests of the New World; which sounds pleasantly, does it not?"

Another American critic, Henry T. Tuckerman, was sounding her praise in his *Thoughts on the Poets,* published in 1848. He felt that she was not only "an honor to her sex," but that "no member thereof could fail to derive advantage from the spirit of her muse," for it spoke words of "heroic cheer," and suggested "thoughtful courage, sublime resignation, and exalted hope." He declared that her "reviews were imbued with the spirit of antique models. The scholar was everywhere coevident with the poet." In this respect he thought she differed

from Mrs. Hemans and Mrs. Norton, in " whose effusions enthusiasm gave the tone and color."

Upon receiving from Mr. Cornelius Mathews his *Poems on Man,* she complimented him by using a line from *The Poet* —

> Fill all the stops of life with tuneful breath —

as a heading to her poem *A Rhapsody of Life's Progress.* His kindness to her caused her to write him to know as much of his " intellectual habits " as he taught her of his " genial feelings." She expressed her thanks for the *Pathfinder* he sent her (" what an excellent name for an American journal," she exclaimed), which contained what seemed to her a somewhat harsh notice of the *Blot on the Scutcheon* of Robert Browning. This was in April, 1843. As she had not then seen the poet, or even known him by correspondence, what she wrote Mr. Mathews has a particular interest in the light of what followed: " Whether through fellow-feeling for Eleusinian mysteries, or whether through the more generous motive of appreciation of his powers, I am very sensitive to the thousand and one stripes with

which the assembly of critics doth expound its vocation over him; and the *Athaeneum,* for instance, made me quite cross and misanthropic last week. The truth is — it is easier to find a more faultless writer than a poet of equal genius. Don't let us fall into the category of the sons of Noah. Noah was once drunk, indeed, but once he built the ark." She then goes on to ask if the *Graham's Miscellany* would care for occasional contributions from her friend Richard Hengist Horne. If so, she thinks she could manage an arrangement upon the same terms as her engagement rested.

Some months later (November, 1843), she wrote Mr. Horne that Mr. Mathews had written her he was delighted with his *Orion,* and was going to send him some poems of his own as "homage from the West." She said he desired her to make known generally that "a copyright club for the protection of authors poor and honest" was being established at New York with Mr. Bryant as president and he, Mr. Mathews, as secretary; and that "we are all to be protected most effectually." In a previous

letter to Mr. Mathews she had referred to a pamphlet on international copyright as " welcome at a distance," but it had not " come near her yet." This refers to one of the speeches he had made in New York city, doubtless the one published at the office of *Arcturus* a few days after its delivery in City Hall in February, 1842. It would have a special interest to the English poet, aside from its subject, because delivered at a dinner given in honor of her compatriot Charles Dickens. Washington Irving, then at the height of his literary reputation, was the president of the occasion. He had known diplomatic life in London as Secretary of the Legation, and was just then nominated by the Senate — Daniel Webster Secretary of State — as Minister to Spain. A letter sent to Dickens upon reading his story of *Little Nell* had caused them from that time, as Dickens afterward said, " to shake hands, *autographically,* across the Atlantic." But his being asked to preside upon this occasion was doubtless more from his interest in the international copyright law, " so long and so ineffecually pressed upon Congress ; " for some two years

before (January, 1840) he had defined his position by a letter to the editor of *The Knickerbocker,* in which he declared that for himself his " literary career as an author was drawing to a close, and could not be much affected by any disposition of the question," but he felt there was a " young literature springing up and daily unfolding itself with wonderful energy and luxuriance, which, as it promised to shed a grace and lustre upon the nation," deserved its " fostering care." Although confessing himself no speech-maker, Mr. Irving was happy in his remarks on this occasion, for, having proposed the sentiment " International Copyright," he said: " It is but fair that those who have laurels for their brows should be permitted to *browse* on their laurels." To this Mr. Mathews responded, closing with, "An International Copyright — The only honest turnpike between the readers of two great nations."

Though strong in feeling on the subject of international rights, the Brownings ever appreciated the effort of the United States to be fair. Referring one time to the " vantage ground of

American pirates" concerning republishing, Mrs. Browning wrote her friend Miss Mitford: "For my part, I have every possible reason to thank and love America; she has been very kind to me." In a letter to Mr. Boyd in 1844, she noted the spirit of a Philadelphia bookseller who, having announced the publication of the *Drama of Exile* as soon as it should reach America, abandoned the idea upon hearing that a New York publisher had proof-sheets direct from the author for its publication. This act of the Americans, in "commanding an American edition to come out either a little before, or simultaneously with, the English one, and provided with a separate preface for themselves," gave the author pleasure. Upon the appearance of the work, she informed her friend Mrs. Martin (November, 1844) that the copies of the American edition "dazzled the English one;" one or two reviews were "transatlantically transcended in vilee flatterie."

Among these reviews of the *Drama of Exile* and other poems was that of Margaret Fuller, who, despite some unfavorable criticism, declared that "in vigor and nobleness of concep-

tion, depth of spiritual experience, and command of classic allusion," Miss Barrett was "above any female writer the world had yet known." She felt it was "a happiness for the critic when, as in the present instance, his task was mainly how to express a cordial admiration; to indicate an intelligence of beauties rather than regret for defects!" Among the poems of the book her favorite seemed to be the *Rhyme of the Dutchess May*. Possibly she was as much impressed as we all are today with those sublime lines:

And I smiled to think God's greatness flowed around
our incompleteness,
'Round our restlessness, His rest.

Mrs. Browning was sane as well as sensitive in her ideas of reviews. She could say what Hawthorne wrote to Poe, after having read his occasional notices of his works: "I care for nothing but the truth, and shall always much more readily accept a harsh truth in regard to my writings than a sugared falsehood." She once declared to Mrs. Martin that as she had never reached her own ideal she could not expect

to have satisfied other people's expectation. "But it is (as I sometimes say) the least ignoble part of me that I love poetry better than I love my own success in it." The same year she wrote Mr. Westland: "It is awful enough, this looking forward to be reviewed. Never mind, the ultimate prosperity of the book lies far above the critics, and can neither be mended nor made nor unmade by them."

When upon the publication of the *Drama of Exile* pleasant words came to her, she confided to Mr. Boyd (August, 1844) that she hoped it was "not wrong to be pleased" at the "kind spirit, the spirit of eager kindness indeed," with which the Americans received the poetry. "In this country (England)," she concluded, "there may be mortifications waiting for me quite enough to keep my modesty in a state of cultivation; I do not know."

When condemnation did come, as for instance in that of *Aurora Leigh,* by her English friends, she comforted herself with the thought that her American publishers "shed tears of sympathy" over the proofs (humorously adding, however,

that perhaps it was in reference to the one hundred pounds they had to pay for them!); and that the critics congratulated her upon having worked herself clear "of affectations, mannerisms, and other morbidities." Possibly she thought of the consolation Bayard Taylor gave, upon calling on her in Paris, when she was about publishing the poem. "She feels a little nervous about it," he wrote the Stoddards in New York (Aug. 4, 1856). "I told her she should not, for if it was good it would surely be appreciated some time or other, and, if not, the sooner it was damned the better; to which polite remark she agreed." If she could have looked into the American home of Celia and Levi Thaxter, she would have seen them reading with delight the new book. "Such good evenings as we have!" wrote Mrs. Thaxter to her friend E. C. Hoxie (1857). "They are so fascinating sometimes we don't break up the meeting till after ten. We draw the table up to the roomy fire and I take my work and Levi reads to me; first he reads *Aurora* (and you're an abominable woman for not thinking it the beautifullest book that ever was written), then *Dred*,

which in spite of the little bird-women, horrid little things, we enjoy."

Or, if she could have seen the letter a young student at the Alexandria Theological Seminary, afterwards famous as Phillips Brooks, was writing to a friend concerning this same *Aurora Leigh* (which he read "as soon as it was out"), she would have been pleased; for in it he declared he did not need to say that he was enthusiastic over it, as he had been over almost everything that Mrs. Browning ever wrote. . . . "It is a great book," he was proud to say, "the book of the year beyond all question, so far as poetry or light literature, if it be light, goes." The year before (1856), in thoughts written out after leaving Harvard College, he had referred to the *Preface* of the first American edition of her *Poems,* which he had been reading, where she refers to poetry as being to her "as serious a thing as life itself."

In the few lines he quoted he declared we had the "key to the spirit of every poem in the volume which they introduced. We say of every poem, and say it consideringly. For there is no poet

that we can recall through the whole range of our English poetry who has so distinctive a character and who lives so constantly in that character as Mrs. Browning. The great reality, sincerity, and significance of all life is what is always weighing on her heart or opens her lips; it is this which always breaks forth into verse." He felt that Mrs. Browning was herself in her poetry from the first line to the last. "Devotion and sincerity like hers," this youth of twenty declared, "are personal, individual things belonging to each man and each woman apart from all other men and women, coinciding, if they coincide at all, by accident and not by agreement. Individuality then, a distinct, refined, personal character, is stamped on all her works. The strength of her thoughts is strong because they are peculiarly her own, no less her own because others have thought the same." The *Sonnets from the Portuguese,* as read conscientiously and carefully, he pronounced as "most beautiful, giving new, fresh, ever more intimate views of their author's character and experience." As read in connection with Mr. Browning's dedication of his *Men and*

Women, which was the other side of the picture, he felt the whole was "complete," revealing "the deep love of two souls as capable of the best and truest love as any two that breathe."

All this reminds one of what Edmund Clarence Stedman said of the *Sonnets* in his essay on Mrs. Browning, that it was "no sacrilege to say that their music was showered from a higher and purer atmosphere than that of the Swan of Avon."

Later, when her *Poems of Congress* received disapprobation in England, Mrs. Browning again looked over the sea; for, as addressed to America, it had been considered rather "an amiable and domestic trait on her part. But England! Heavens and Earth! What a crime! The very suspicion of it is guilt." Hearing still further criticism of her work, she wrote Miss Haworth (1860): "For the rest, being turned out of the old world I fall on my feet in the new world, where people have been generous and even publishers turned liberal. Think of my having an offer (on the ground of that book) from a periodical in New York of one hundred dollars for every single poem, though as

short as a sonnet, that is, for its merely passing through their pages on the road to the publishers proper." Writing to Mrs. Jameson of the "extravagant praises and *prices* which had been offered her from over the western sea, in consequence of these *Poems before Congress,*" she added: "The nation is generous in these things and not thin-skinned." She then told her she was working at some Italian lyrics, several of which she had sent to the New York *Independent.**

After the appearance of these Napoleonic *Poems* Mrs. Browning wrote an American friend: "My book has had a very angry reception in my native country, as you probably observe, *but I*

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* The following eleven *Poems* published in thirteen months' time — from June 7, 1860, to July 25, 1861 — are now found in the files of that paper: "First News from Villa France" (June 7, 1860); "King Victor Emmanuel entering Florence" (August 16, 1860); "The Sword of Castruccio Castrocani" (August 30, 1860); "Summing up in Italy" (Sept. 27, 1860); "Garibaldi" (October 11, 1860); "De Profundis" (Dec. 6, 1860); "Parting Lovers" (March 21, 1861); "Mother and Poet" (May 2, 1861); "Only a Curl" (May 16, 1861); "The King's Gift, Caprera" (July 18, 1861); published at same time with news of her death, dated Florence, June 29th; "A View across the Roman Campagna" (July 25, 1861).

shall be forgiven one day; meanwhile, forgiven or unforgiven, it is satisfactory to one's own soul to have spoken the truth as one apprehends the truth." Alluding to the American feeling against Napoleon, she said: "Mr. F. hints that your people are not very Napoleonist. *Neither am I,* in any particular sense." She then called attention to the poem in the *Independent,* "Summing Up," in which she thus wrote of him:

> Napoleon — as strong as ten armies,
> Corrupt as seven devils — a fact
> You accede to, then seek where the harm is
> Drained off from the man to his act,
> And find . . . a free nation! Suppose
> Some hell-brood in Eden's sweet greenery
> Convoked for creating . . . a rose!
> Would it suit the infernal machinery?

The friend to whom she wrote this, in commenting on it, well said: "This, in prose, is, if the Devil's workmen be doing God's work, who ought to hinder? Such was Mrs. Browning's Napoleonism."

As we all know, a free and united Italy was finally fulfilled in Napoleon's formal recognition of Italian freedom and unity very soon after her

death. Would she could have lived to see this dream of her life!

While interested in her own success, Mrs. Browning never lost sight of the appreciation Americans were giving her countrymen. In her *Essay on Carlyle* she refers to the fact of his being generally read in America before he was truly recognized in his own land — a fact, she says, "replete with favorable promise for that great country, and indicative of a noble love of truth in it passing the love of dollars."

Carlyle at this time was not only being read in America, but appreciating its practical help; for, in his correspondence with Emerson, he expressed his thanks for the draft of fifty-one pounds enclosed in his letter — "a new, unexpected munificence out of America — which is ever and anon dropping gifts upon me — to be received, as indeed they partly are, like manna dropped out of the sky, the gift of unseen divinities!" Later, upon receiving from Emerson another draft of thirty-six pounds and odd shillings, he wrote him: "America, I think, is like an amiable teapot: you think it is all out long since, and lo, the valuable

implement yields you another cup and another! Many thanks to *you,* who are the heart of America to me."

But Mrs. Browning's greatest joy was in the recognition America was giving her poet-husband. She felt that the forty-two pages given by the *North American Review* of April, 1848, to his *Plays and Poems* had well introduced the work to American readers, as had also Margaret Fuller's review of "Bells and Pomegranates" in the *New York Tribune;* indeed, this critic's short review of *Paracelsus* in the Boston *Dial* of April, 1843, had appeared before any English notice saw the light. Years afterward, when the sale of his poems in England was almost infinitessimal, Mrs. Browning rejoiced in the fact that they were known and prized in the United States. "Ah, dear Sarianna," she wrote his sister in March, 1861, "I don't complain for myself of an unappreciative public. *I have no reason.* But just for *that* reason I complain more about Robert — only he does not hear me complain. . . . In America he is a power, a writer, a poet — he is read, he lives in the hearts of the people." After re-

ferring to Browning's readings in Boston, she says: "The English hunt lions too, but their lions are chiefly chosen among Lords." She then wonders if Robert had told her ("no, I fancy not," she hastens to say) that an English lady of rank had recently asked the American Minister whether Robert Browning was not an American. "Is it possible," replied the Minister, "that you ask me this? Why, there is not so poor a village in the United States where they would not tell you that Robert Browning was an Englishman, and that they were very sorry he was not an American." To all this the proud wife adds: "Very pretty of the American Minister, was it not? — and literally true, besides."

This was all the more gratifying to Mrs. Browning because from the first she herself had felt full faith in him and his work. Soon after her correspondence with him began, she had written to an American friend that he was "full of great intentions; the light of the future is on his forehead . . . . he is a poet for posterity. I have a full faith in him as poet and prophet." What would she or her poet-husband have said

could they have known of his first published book, "Pauline: a Fragment of a Confession, 1833," as having been sold at the Daniel F. Appleton auction sale in New York city in 1903 for one thousand and twenty-five dollars; thus making it rank with Poe's "Tamerlane" as a record-price book.

Lowell, in reviewing *Luria,* as early as 1848, declared it to be if not the best of Browning's dramas certainly one of the "most striking in its clearness of purpose, the energetic rapidity of its movement, the harmony of its details, the natural attraction with which they all tend toward and at last end in the consummation, and in the simplicity and concentration of its tragic element." He had declared that his men and women were men and women, and not Mr. Browning masquerading in different colored dominoes.

Professor Hiram Corson of Cornell University, in his *Primer of English Verse,* affirmed of *The Ring and the Book* that all things considered it was the "greatest achievement of the century in blank verse;" not the greatest in bulk (although it has double the number of *Paradise*

Lost) but in the effective use of blank verse in the treatment of a great subject. He even declared that it was the greatest subject when viewed aright which had been treated in English poetry — "vastly greater in its bearings upon the higher education of man than that of the *Paradise Lost*." He felt that, while having a "most complex variety of character," it was the "most dramatic blank verse since the Elizabethan era." All this was his conclusion after having read the entire poem aloud to classes every year for several years.

Another American critic, Edmund Clarence Stedman, though struck with wonder at the "changeful flow of verse" in this poem, and the "facility wherewith the poet records the speculation of his various characters," felt compelled to ask in his essay on Browning if it was "a stronghold of poetic art." As a whole, he confessed he could not admit that it was; and yet the "thought, the vocabulary, the imagery, the wisdom lavished upon the story would equip a score of ordinary writers, and place them beyond danger of neglect."

Much could be copied here of valuable criticism of this and other work of Browning given by some of America's best writers, such as William D. Howells, George E. Woodberry, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Moncure D. Conway, George Willis Cooke, Charlotte Porter, and Helen A. Clarke. That they have been far-seeing and loyal to the poet argues to the credit of all. When Richard Garnett in his Life of Emerson tells us that Emerson included Browning in the list of new acquaintances he made in England, in 1872, would he could have told his opinion of him! But silence on the subject seems to be uppermost in all of Emerson's pathway.

American poets, however, have not been idle in expression, as seen, for instance, in the following *Sonnet* of Mrs. Louise Chandler Moulton:

The Century was young — the month was May —
  The spacious East was kindled with a light
  That lent a sudden glory to the night,
And a new star began its upward way
Toward the high splendor of the perfect day.
  With pure white flame, inexorably bright,
  It reached the souls of men — no stain so slight
As to escape its all-revealing ray.

When countless voices cried "The Star has set!"
And through the lands there surged a sea of pain,
Was it Death's triumph — victory of Woe?
Nay! There are lights the sky may not forget;
When suns, and moons, and souls shall rise again,
In the New Life's wide East that star shall glow.

Neither have American artists failed to remember the work of either Mr. or Mrs. Browning. Ross Turner has added to his illumination of Omar Khayyam's *Rubaiyat* and other masterpieces that of the *Portuguese Sonnets.* It was a joy indeed to see in a foremost place among the literary treasures of the Browning Palace in Venice, as the artist's gift to the poet-husband, the illustrated American work of Ipsen, as seen in the *Sonnets.*

Browning himself ever showed a recognition of personal appreciation of his work in America. It was a pleasure to him to procure for the British Museum, as one of the curiosities of literature, the first complete edition of his works as reprinted in the *Official Guide* of the Chicago & Alton Railroad in monthly issues from 1872-1874. He flattered himself that in this *Railway*

Time Table he came near to the heart of the people. He revealed a still further recognition when, on the death of Levi Lincoln Thaxter, he responded to his son's request for an inscription for the tombstone with the following lines:

Thou whom these eyes saw never! Say, friends true,
Who say my soul, helped onward by my song,
Though all unwittingly, has helped thee too?
I gave of but the little that I knew;
How were the gift requited, while along
Life's path I pace, could'st thou make weakness strong!
Help me with knowledge—for Life's old—Death's new!
(R. B. to L. L. T., April, 1885.)

A few years before, Mrs. Thaxter had written the poet that he was to Levi "the great enthusiasm of his life." Together they had enjoyed reading his books. "I don't think you can have any conception," she wrote her friend E. C. Hoxie, "what an infinite source of pleasure and consolation under all trials Browning's *Men and Women* is to me.

"There is something satisfactory to every mood of the human mind in that book. Many of the shorter pieces I know by heart, and you would

laugh to hear the children, who catch everything from me, talking about

> "The patching house-leek's head of blossom wink
> Through the chinks . . . "

Later she is asking this same friend if she has heard the "wise thrush" of Browning —

> That's the wise thrush; he sings each song twice over
> Lest you should think he never could recapture
> The first fine careless rapture!

Doubtless she felt with Stedman and many others that, though having in mind Shakespeare and Shelley, these three lines were, nevertheless, the finest ever written touching the song of a bird.

"If you don't hear him," says Mrs. Thaxter, "perhaps you'll see the man who wrote about him, which will, perhaps, be better." She declared he was one with all his "wits about him, duly alive and aware. . . . What vitality in all his words, what splendid power!" After all, she felt there was no one "quite so satisfying to the human mind, and no one who wearied of his worthiest speech any more than of Shakespeare."

Years later, in 1890, in writing to her friend Bradford Torrey of birds being that winter "the horrors of women's headgear," she refers to Browning's having a "shot at these senseless women in *Asolando,* his last book."

Browning's personal tribute to Levi Thaxter recalls one bestowed a few years before on another American, a daughter of his friend Mrs. Bronson — as seen in a little book, which had among other contributions of poet and artist the following lines Longfellow had written:

> She who comes to me and pleadeth
> In the lovely name of Edith
> Will not fail of what was wanted.
> Edith means the "Blessed." Therefore
> All that she may wish or care for
> Will, when best for her, be granted!

To ten lines from his *Epilogue of Dramatic Idyls* beginning "Touch him ne'er so lightly into song he broke," etc., Browning added:

> Thus I wrote in London, musing on my betters,
> Poets dead and gone; and lo, the critics cried,
> "Out on such a boast!" as if I dreamed that fetters
> Binding Dante, bind up — me! as if true pride
> Were not also humble!

So I smiled and sighed,
As I oped your book in Venice this bright morning,
Sweet new friend of mine! and felt the clay or sand—
Whatso'er my soil be—break—for praise or scorning—
Out in grateful fancies—weeds; but weeds expand
Almost into flowers, held by such a kindly band!

October 14, 1880. (The *Century Magazine*, Vol. 25.)

This facility for impromptu expression so interested his American friend Mrs. Clara J. Bloomfield-Moore that once in opening before him a letter from George Bancroft, the historian, in which he had mentioned the approach of his eighty-seventh birthday, she proposed that he write something for her to cable. Almost as quick as thought he wrote:

Bancroft, the message-bearing wire,
Which flashes my all-hail today,
Moves slowlier than the heart's desire
That what hand pens, tongue's self might say.

(May *Lippincott*, 1890.)

This facility of expression, also shown in impromptus to others, has not been wanting in the American friends. Some instances may not be out of place here. In a copy of Browning Bliss

Carman wrote sixteen four-line verses ending thus:

Since first I sought you, found you, and bought you,
Hugged you, and brought you home from Cornhill,
While some upbraid you, and some parade you,
Nine years have made you my master still.

In a Christmas gift of 1882 by my side, "*Agamemnon La Saissaz and Dramatic Idyls,*" is this impromptu of its giver, B. P. Shillaber (Mrs. Partington):

A merry Christmas I send with this,
Though it seems absurdity crowning
To wish for cachinatory bliss
Over the works of Browning.

Later, when presenting me *Parleyings with Certain People* (1887), he wrote:

R. Browning, Browning, why your time exhaust
By these mysterious workings of your fancy,
Conjuring phantoms like another Faust,
Respect demanding for your necromancy?
Like some rare mechanism, genius-fraught,
We gaze, admire, yet fail we to command them;
Your ways show sweet perplexities of thought
That fascinate, though we can't understand them!

In a volume of selected poems of Mrs. Browning, which followed this, the genial, loving soul wrote:

> Contrite for my preceding gift
> Of Rob., with occult mysteries rife,
> I here the cloud reproachful lift
> By these sweet poems of his wife.

It is interesting to notice that Mrs. Browning's loyalty to the Americans made her sensitive to criticism of them. When Dickens' *America* appeared she declared to Mrs. Martin (1843) that if she were an American it would make her "rabid," and "certain of the free citizens are furious, I understand, while others 'speak peace and ensue it.'" She said she admired Mr. Dickens as "an imaginative writer," and she "loved the Americans;" but she couldn't possibly "admire or love that book"—and yet she herself dared criticise American affairs. She criticised authors, even James Russell Lowell (who had written her several letters "all very kind"), declaring that though he had a "refined fancy," and was "graceful for an American critic," yet he was "not deep enough in his pre-

sentation of the early dramatists." When in that same year (1845) Mrs. Sigourney sent her her *Scenes in My Native Land* she wrote the same friend (Mr. Browning) that, peeping between the uncut leaves, she read of the "poet Hillhouse of sublime spirit and Miltonic energy standing in the temple of Fame as if it were built on purpose for him." "I suppose," she concludes, "he is like most of the American poets, who are shadows of the true — as flat as a shadow, as colorless as a shadow, as lifeless and as transitory." Even when praising Poe to Mr. Browning (1846) she declared that *Politian* would make him laugh, as the *Raven* had made her laugh — though with something in it which accounts for the hold it took upon the people such as Mr. N. P. Willis and his peers." She had to acknowledge, however, that there was "poetry in the man seen between the great gaps of bathos." Around this charitable conclusion might have lingered the glowing testimony Poe gave her in the *Evening Mirror* some two years before (October, 1844), when he said she "was worth a dozen of Tennyson and six of Motherwell —

equal perhaps in original genius to Keats and Shelley." This was followed in the *Mirror* of Dec. 7, 1844, by another unmistakable sentence on the poet: "We do not believe there is a poetical soul embodied in this world that, as a center of thought, sees further out towards the periphery permitted to angels than Miss Barrett."

Poe also reviewed her in the first two numbers of the *Broadway Journal* of 1845. "She has surpassed all her poetical contemporaries of either sex (with a single exception) that exception being Tennyson."

While Mrs. Browning is interested in the work of the American men she has an eye for what the women are doing. In 1854, she is wondering if Miss Mitford had seen Julia Ward Howe's *Passion Flowers,* just out. "They were sent me by an American friend," she writes, "but were intercepted *en route,* so that I have not set eyes on them yet, but one or two persons not particularly reliable as critics have praised them to me." She then goes on to tell that though she is "the wife of the deaf and dumb philanthro-

pist" (that was the fact as it reached her) "she is herself neither deaf nor dumb (very much the contrary); but, as she understood, a handsome woman and brilliant in society." A few weeks later, having read the poems, she declared to this same friend: "Some of them are good — many of the thoughts striking, and all of a certain elevation. Of poetry, however, strictly speaking, there is not much; and there is a large proportion of conventional stuff in the volume. . . . Of the ordinary impotencies and prettinesses of female poets she does not partake, but she can't take rank with poets in the good meaning of the word, I think, so as to stand without leaning. Also there is some bad taste and affectations in the dressing of her personality." But with all this criticism she finds space to declare that she "must be a clever woman." (Letters, Vol. II.) Thus to her sharpest criticism ever hovers a loving charity. Even when sending off to the Americans her thirty-six stanza poem, *The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point,* she felt it might be "too ferocious" for them to publish. But "they asked for a poem and they

shall have it," she declared. She even wrote Miss Mitford that nobody would want to print it because she "could not help making it bitter." If they did print it she should think them "more boldly in earnest" than she fancied them. That the Americans did realize its value for them in that period of their history is seen in its appearance in *The Liberty Bell,* a publication issued and for sale by the Boston Anti-Slavery Bazar of 1848.

From that time on Mrs. Browning watched even more closely the slavery question in the United States. As early as 1853 she is discussing the matter with Mrs. Jameson: "A difficult question — yes! All virtue is difficult. England found it difficult, France found it difficult. But we did not make ourselves an armchair for our sins. As for America, I honor America in much; but I would not be an American for the world while she wears that shameful scar upon her brow." She declares that the address of the new President, General Franklin Pierce, "exasperated" her. "Observe, I am an abolitionist," she continues, "not to the fanatical degree, because I

hold that compensation should be given by the North to the South, as in England. The States should unite in buying off this national disgrace." She wrote all this in the idea that Mrs. Jameson thought a woman had no business with questions like slavery. "Then she had better use a pen no more," she said. "She had better subside into slavery and concubinage herself, I think, as in the times of old, shut herself up with the Penelopes in the women's apartment, and take no rank among thinkers and speakers. Certainly you are not in earnest in these things." This expression of her feeling reminded her that the "Americans were very kind and earnest," and she liked them "all the better for their warm feeling" towards Mrs. Jameson.

When the Civil War was approaching she wrote Mrs. Martin from Rome (December, 1860) that "the crisis had come earlier than anyone expected. It is a crisis; and if the North accepts such a compromise as has been proposed the nation perishes morally, which would be sadder than the mere dissolution of States however sad. It is the difference between the death of the soul

and of the body." She felt there "might and ought to be a pecuniary compromise; but a compromise of principle would be fatal." She was confident that in their then Italian affairs Italy could learn from America that "a certain degree of centralization (not carried too far) was necessary to a strong and vital government." Lincoln's *Inaugural Address,* with the exception of certain expressions which did strike her as a superfluity of the official form, she "admired." It seemed to her "direct and resolute, simple, and intense." (The superfluity was Mr. Lincoln's voluntary offer to return fugitive slaves.) In another letter to this same American friend she alludes to a speech she had read in an American paper. "What affected me most," she wrote, "was not the eloquence — no, but the rare union of largeness and tolerance with fidelity to special truth. In our age faith and charity are found, but they are found apart. We tolerate everybody, because we doubt everything; or else we tolerate nobody because we believe something."

During the early part of the war she continued to fear the North would compromise; that they

were not "heroically strong on their legs on the moral question. I fear it much," she repeated. "If they can but hold up it will be noble. . . . Not that I despair of America," she wrote Miss Blagden; "God forbid." She could not agree with those who were willing to let the South go. She believed that "the unity of the States should be asserted with a strong hand and the South forced to pay taxes and submit to law." If the North would only "be faithful to its conscience," there would be "an increase of greatness after a few years, even though it may rain blood betwixt then and now." At this same time she repeated to another friend (Miss Haworth) her anxiety about the United States, "fearing a compromise" in the North. "All other dangers," she said, were "comparatively null." In an article on *Italy and America,* published in the New York *Independent* of March 21, 1861, she declared again that if the North stood fast on the moral ground no glory would be like their glory. "You are compassed by a great cloud of witnesses," she wrote, "and can afford to risk anything except conscience." She further declared that she

honored Republicanism everywhere as an expression of the people; but it seemed to her that a theoretical attachment to any form of government whatever was "simply pedantry, as if one should insist upon everybody's wearing one kind of hat, or adopting one attitude." She believed that a genuine government was "simply the attitude of that special people"; that what was required for every man (or state) was "life, health, muscular freedom to choose his own attitude. Let us be for Democracy," she urged, "and leave the rest. Who cares for the figure at the helm, as long as the people's wind is in the sails? I care little. Only I do care that the Democracy should have power — that each man should have the inheritance of a man, and the right of voting where he is taxed." This, she affirmed, was her "creed." In this same article she said nothing would "destroy the Republic but what corrupted its conscience and disturbed its fame — for the stain upon the honor must come off upon the flag." Her look at the practical side of the matter led her to ask: "Ought not the North, for instance, to propose a pecuni-

ary compromise, taxing itself for compensation to the South?"

Among the last things she read, and found pleasure in discussing with an American friend, were Motley's letters on the *American Crisis*. Referring to what foreign nations were saying, she said: "Why do you heed what others say? You are strong and can do without sympathy; and when you have triumphed your glory will be the greater."

That Mrs. Browning could feel this deep interest in a far-off nation while so fully laboring for the progress of her loved and suffering Italy, reveals the magnitude of her intelligence and sympathies. Her inclination was ever to the development of the individual. As early as 1848 she wrote Miss Mitford that "Liberty and civilization when married together lawfully rather evolve individuality than tend to generalization;" and a few days later she wrote John Kenyon, "Nothing can be more hateful to me than this communist idea of quenching individualities in the mass. As if the hope of the world did not always consist in the eliciting of the individual

man from the background of the masses in the evolvement of individual gains, virtue, magnanimity."

One could say of this what Stedman said of *Aurora Leigh,* "that an audacious, speculative freedom pervades it which smacks of the New World rather than the Old."

Though Mr. Browning does not appear to say as much on affairs in the United States as his wife, when he does speak he is strong and helpful; as, for instance, when he declared in a letter to an American, dated September 11, 1861: "I have lost the explanation of American affairs, but I assure you of my belief in the justice and my confidence in the triumph of the great cause. For the righteousness of the principle I want no information. God prosper it and its defenders." (Browning Society Papers, Part XII.)

The month before, August, 1861, upon hearing of the disaster at Bull's Run, he had written William W. Story that, so far as he knew anything about it from having glanced at a single newspaper, he felt that the good cause had suffered, and that "we all suffer with it." . . .

He looked, however, to success in the end "with every confidence." "You must and will do better, and best, another time," he continues, "and meanwhile, the fewer big words on all sides in any sense, the better!" (James' Life of Story.) Later, in November, in referring again to the American news, he declares that he never heard a "word for the South even from those who think the North underestimated its strength, and despair of a better issue than separation." "*We* say fight it out to the last; but for English lookers-on who abjure heroics, to say that would be saying: Do yourselves as much harm as you can."

Years before the Civil War, Powers' *Greek Slave* had stirred the soul of Mrs. Browning in these closing words of a *Sonnet*:

Pierce to the centre
Art's fiery finger, and break up ere long
The serfdom of this world. Appeal, fair stone
From God's pure heights of beauty against man's wrong!
Catch up in thy divine face, not alone
East griefs but west, and strike and shame the strong
By thunders of white silence overthrown.

Thus in looking at the art of America the eye and heart of the poet-woman paused in the interests of freedom. She even dared to express her belief to Bayard Taylor, upon meeting him in London in 1851, that a Republican form of government was unfavorable to the development of the fine arts. To this opinion Mr. Taylor dissented "as modestly as possible," and soon had a powerful ally in Mr. Browning, who declared that no artist had ever before been honored with a more splendid commission than the state of Virginia had given to Thomas Crawford for a monument in Richmond. A general historical discussion followed, Mr. and Mrs. Browning taking different views. "It was good-humoredly closed at last," said Mr. Taylor in his *At Home and Abroad,* "and I thought both of them seemed to enjoy it. There is no fear that two such fine intellects will rust; they will keep each other bright through the delight of the encounter."

Several years later (in 1855), the Brownings were enjoying art talks with another American, Mr. James Russell Lowell. It was in one of the art galleries of Paris, where Mr. Lowell was

particularly interested, as he wrote Professor Charles Eliot Norton, in Vandyke's portrait of Lady Venetia Digby. He said he " was glad to show Mrs. Browning the likeness of a woman who had inspired so noble and enduring a love in so remarkable a man as Sir Kenelm."

But other manifestations than those of the fine arts were claiming the Brownings' attention, and arousing animated but kindly discussions with their friends. Mrs. Browning was " hearing," and " would hear much " of the " rapping spirits." She is asking Miss Blagden (winter of 1852-3) if her American friends ever wrote to her about them, as she had heard that at least 15,000 Americans " of all classes and society were mediums, as the term is. . . . Most curious, these phenomena," she concludes. After referring to the matter in a letter to Miss Mitford, she somewhat apologizes for herself by saying: " You know I am rather a visionary, and inclined to knock round at all the doors of the present world to try to get out, so that I listen with interest to every goblin story of the kind, and indeed I hear enough of them just now."

Any harsh criticism of this mental attitude of Mrs. Browning always brings to my mind what she wrote to Miss Haworth: "Investigation is all I desire. It is not the communications that impress me, but the probability of such. I look at the movement."

It was an American, our own Harriet Beecher Stowe, who seemed to understand Mrs. Browning on this subject, as she "opened out to her very fully" in the Florentine home. The "character of Mrs. Stowe's intellect" pleased her; she was "devout, yet brave in the outlook for truth, considering not whether a thing be sound, but whether it be true." She was impressed by what she wrote her of hearing from her drowned boy, "without any seeking on her part," declaring that she "spoke very calmly about it, with no dogmatism, but with the strongest disposition to receive the facts of the subject with all their bearings and at whatever loss of orthodoxy or sacrifice of reputation for common sense." The appearance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* some years before had interested her. "No woman ever had such a success," she wrote Miss Mitford (1853), "such a

fame no man ever had in a single book. For my own part, I rejoice greatly in it. It is an individual glory full of healthy influence and benediction to the world." A month later she wrote Mrs. Jameson that she *must* read the book. "It is quite a sign of the times, and has otherwise, and intrinsically, considerable power. For myself, I rejoice in the success both as a woman and a human being."

Upon meeting Mrs. Stowe for the first time, several years later, she confessed she liked her better than she thought she should. "I find more refinement in the voice and manner, no rampant Americanism. Very simple and gentle; undesirous of shining or *poser-ing*, so it seems to me. . . She is nice-looking, too; there is something strong, copious, and characteristic in her dusky, wavy hair. For the rest, the brow has not very large capacity, and the mouth wants something, both in frankness and sensitiveness I should say. But what can one see in a morning visit? I must wait for another opportunity. . . . Her books are not so much to me, I confess, as the fact is

that she above all women (yes, and men of the age) has moved the world — and for good."

Years afterwards Mrs. Stowe expressed her feeling for Mrs. Browning's personality when she wrote the Duchess of Argyle (July 31, 1883) that none of her poems could express what *she* was — so grand, so comprehending, so strong, with such inspired sight;" she said she "stood by Italy through its crisis. Her heart was with all good through the world."

Others besides Mrs. Stowe were more or less interested in Mrs. Browning's thought concerning spiritual manifestations. The Hawthornes, then living (1858) in the Montaüto Villa just outside the walls of Florence, had their attention particularly called to it through a certain power possessed by a governess in their employ which Mrs. Browning had noticed. Mrs. Hawthorne, however, in writing to her sister, Elizabeth Peabody, of the conversations she was having with the Brownings on the subject, confessed that she "kept aloof in mind" in such things, because Mr. Hawthorne had "such a repugnance to the whole thing." She believed that Mrs. Brown-

ing was "a spiritualist," while Mr. Browning "opposed and protested with all his might," but was "ready to be convinced." She recalls her attempt in talking of spirit-hands, "to stem his flow of eager, funny talk with her slender voice, but, like an arrowy river, he rushed and foamed and leaped over her slight tones, and she could not succeed in explaining how she *knew* they were spirit-hands." Though not particularly in sympathy with her in this matter, Mrs. Hawthorne found her "wonderfully interesting — the most delicate sheath for a soul" she ever saw. "You would be infinitely charmed," she wrote her sister, "and with Mr. Browning as well. The latter is very mobile, and flings himself about just as he flings his thoughts on paper, while his wife is still and contemplative. Love, evidently, has saved her life." The following year she refers to delightful visits with them, and especially to a horseback ride she enjoyed with him. In her *Diary* she tells that while stopping to talk with a friend one day he "darted upon them across the Piazza glowing with cordiality." But the exquisite sympathy of Mrs. Browning, when Una,

the beloved first-born, was ill with Roman fever, as told us by her daughter Rose in her *Memories,* was particularly precious to her. "Even dear Mrs. Browning," she says, "who almost never goes upstairs, came the moment she heard. She was like an angel. I saw her but a moment, but the clasp of her hand was electric, and her voice permeated my heart." "Fortunate the eyes that see her," she once exclaimed, "and the ears that hear her." In a letter, now for the first time published, written to a member of the household at that time — April, 1859 — Mrs. Browning reveals her anxiety and love:

> How I thank you for your little note — and the relief it gives me. May God bless you all and bless and keep that dear, sweet Una, whose lovely face as I saw it last has been since so painful to me to think of. You are very good, very comprehending — but a touch of common human sympathy is worth nothing at such a moment to poor Mrs. Hawthorne. If it is, she must be very large-hearted indeed. I hope and trust that the medical judgment will prove to be quite wrong. The youth and the vitality of the patient will go far and stand long against disease.
>
> Let me subscribe myself
>
> Affectionately yours,
>
> ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

She then adds in a postscript:

You need not take the trouble of sending — *we* will send.

In his *English Notes* Hawthorne has left one of the finest pictures literature has revealed of Mrs. Browning. It was at a breakfast at Moncton Milnes, in 1856, when the shy, sensitive man was assigned to lead her to the breakfast-room, "a small, delicate woman, with ringlets of dark hair, a pleasant, intelligent, and sensitive face," looking "youthful and comely," and "very gentle and ladylike." In a "low, agreeable voice," she conversed on various subjects. She said spiritualism interested her much, although Mr. Browning "utterly rejected the subject, and would not believe even in the outward manifestations of which there was such overwhelming evidence." They discussed the theory of Delia Bacon concerning Shakespeare, "greatly to the horror" of Mrs. Browning. "On the whole," Hawthorne confesses, "I like her the better for loving the man Shakespeare with a personal love." They talked of Margaret Fuller, of William Wetmore Story; indeed, they talked "a good deal" during

breakfast, for, he declares, she was "of that quickly appreciative and responsive order of woman with whom I can talk more freely than with any man; and she has, besides, her own originality wherewith to help on conversation, though I should say not of a loquacious tendency. . . . I like her much."

After the breakfast he had a talk with Mr. Browning — "handsome, with brown hair, very simple and agreeable in manner, gently impulsive, talking as if his heart were uppermost. He spoke of his pleasure in meeting me and his appreciation of my books." Referring to the fact that he mentioned the *Blithedale Romance* as the one he admired most, he wondered why. "I hope," he concludes, "I showed as much pleasure at his praise as he did at mine, for I was glad to see how pleasantly it moved him."

Hawthorne must have known of Browning's appreciation of his work, for some time before (1851) Mr. Fields had written him from Paris that Browning had said he was "the finest genius that had appeared in English literature for many years."

Mary Anderson felt the frank, charming personality of Browning, when meeting him at a party where he took her out to dinner, she says — in her *Memoirs* — there was "a kind of friendly chattiness in his conversation," which, however, seemed to her "to be more agreeable than distinguished." She confessed she should have named any of the men at table sooner than he as the author of *Rabbi Ben Ezra* and *Pippa Passes*. Her first impression was that he resembled an "old-school Southern country gentleman" more than her ideal of England's mystic poet. He seemed always at his best, she thought, in the studio of some artist. The poet was evidently pleased with "our Mary," for he told a friend afterwards that he found her "charming," a very "sensible young woman."

Another American, Edith Abell the gifted musician, in recalling pleasant hours spent with the poet in 1889-1890, also testifies to the genial, simple bearing he ever manifested towards her. He was the same "cordial, genial, happy *gentleman* — the great poet being always kept in the background." She says he was always pleased

to read his poems aloud, and he also knew how to say the nice thing. "I will read to you, and in return you shall sing to me." Among the little incidents of her personal acquaintance with him she recalls his unaffected, and even childlike delight, when, upon making her guess his age, she candidly and honestly named some fifteen years less than he really was. This caused him to challenge her to read without a magnifying glass what he would write with his naked eye — for he did not use glasses. As a result she now owns a precious card he gave her on which, with his autograph, he wrote a verse of four lines which her thumb-nail could easily cover, and which few have strong sight enough to read without glasses.

The Hon. Andrew D. White of Cornell University in his diplomatic Reminiscences testifies to the conversational qualities of Browning. This was revealed to him under somewhat novel circumstances. He was in London, in 1879, on his way to take up his duties of Minister to Germany as successor to Bayard Taylor. One evening at the home of Alma Tadema he met Robert

Browning. On their departure, as Mr. Browning's carriage did not arrive, he offered to take him home in his; but hardly had they started when they found themselves in a dense fog. It was soon evident that the driver had lost his way. "As he wandered about for perhaps an hour," says Mr. White, "hoping to find some indication of it, Browning's conversation was very agreeable. It ran at first on current questions, then on travel, and finally on art — all very simply and naturally, without a trace of posing or paradox. Remembering the obscurity of his verse I was surprised at the lucidity of his talk. But at last both of us becoming somewhat anxious we called a halt, and questioned the driver, who confessed that he had no idea where he was. As good or ill luck would have it there just then emerged from the fog an empty hansom cab, and, finding that its driver knew more than ours, I engaged him as a pilot first to Browning's house, and then to my own."

Both Mr. and Mrs. Browning showed a familiarity with the works of American authors, each having their favorites. As early as 1853

Mrs. Browning wrote Miss Mitford (so Miss Mitford wrote Mr. Fields) that she preferred Lowell and Emerson. She found in some English books of Henry Ward Beecher's writings "fine and thrilling things." She declared they would "help her to live," and perhaps they would "help her to suffer." Mr. Browning illustrated this knowledge even more practically when, upon meeting Bayard Taylor at one time, he welcomed him with "From the Desert I Come to Thee." He not only knew it by heart, but said it was the finest thing of the kind he ever read; at which the poet, in writing the fact to his New York friends, the Stoddards, exclaimed: *"Hold me!"*

This friendly interest in American literature doubtless led Una Hawthorne, in taking up the work her mother left of looking over the Hawthorne manuscripts, to ask Mr. Browning's assistance in deciphering *Septimius* ere it was published. But there was another, a more tender, link to the poet. He had known her and her sister Rose in their sorrow; for he had been one of the friends who had joined the American

friends, Moncure D. Conway, William Henry Channing, and Russell Sturgis, as they stood by the open grave of her mother in Kensal Green Cemetery that March day of 1871. She could never forget it.

American scenery, as well as American literature, was also noted by the Brownings. In her prose essay on the Poets Mrs. Browning refers to Niagara Falls in treating of God in nature and poetry. "Nature is where God is. Poetry is where God is. Can you go up or down or around and not find Him? In the loudest hum of your machinery, in the densest volume of your steam, in the foulest street of your city — there, as surely as in the Brocken pine woods and the watery thunders of Niagara — there as surely as He is above all lie Nature and Poetry in full life. Speak and they will answer." Years before, in her *Essay on Mind,* she had referred to Niagara. "Behold afar, the playmate of the storm" — "himself the savage of his native woods"; and, again, "Wild Niagara lifts his awful form." And yet she never saw the glory, for she nor her husband never came to America.

In later years Mr. Browning through "innumerable requests for autographs" (with which, Mrs. Bronson tells us, he "was amused, but never impatient,") heard particularly of the "Western States and far California." A more lasting testimony, however, was the dedication to him of a pyramidal pile of rocks, which Joaquin Miller erected on the summit of a hill in his California home.

Local expressions of Americans were noted by the Brownings; as, when settled in some new quarters for a season, Mrs. Browning wrote Miss Blagden: "Now we are fixed, as our American friends would say."

Their friendly intercourse with Americans is noticeable through all their Florentine life. "The visits we receive from delightful and cordial persons of that country have been most gratifying to us," wrote Mrs. Browning. Settled in *Casa Guidi,* they saw even "more Americans than English," she wrote Miss Mitford in 1848. She it was to whom she also told of her happy married life. "After more than twenty months of marriage we are happier than ever — I may say *we.*"

She felt she could never make her friend understand what her husband was to her — "the noblest and perfectest of human beings." After "an absolute soul-to-soul intercourse and union," she had to "look higher still for her first ideal." She also wrote of her joy to Mrs. Jameson, not only because she was the first to know their happiness, but that she might "set down in her photography of the possibility of book-making creatures living happy together." She confessed she was "happier and happier month after month." She had to admit, however, that her husband was "an exceptional human being and that it wouldn't be just to measure another by him." (Letters.) This exceptional husband had also his confession to make to Mrs. Jameson of his exceptional wife, when he wrote of her "entirely angel nature, as divine a heart as God ever made. I know more of her every day; I who thought I knew something of her five years ago."

In this restful, growing life American literarians were privileged to enter. In 1847, Mrs. Browning refers to George Stillman Hillard as

" an American critic who reviewed her in (the old) world and so came to *view* her in the new; a very intelligent man of a good noble spirit." Her friend Kenyon, who was also fond of the Americans, was appreciative of this one, calling him at one time the " best prepared " young foreigner he had ever met who had come to see Europe. James T. Fields tells, in his *Yesterday with Authors,* that at Kenyon's dinner table he heard him say, in the presence of Mrs. Jameson, Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle, Walter Savage Landor, Mr. and Mrs. Browning, and the Proctors, that one of the best talkers on any subject that might be started was the author of *Six Months in Italy.* We are all familiar with the picture of the Brownings Mr. Hillard has given in this book; that a " happier home and a more perfect union than theirs " it was not easy to imagine; that Browning's poetry was " subtle, passionate, and profound," but he himself was " simple, natural, and playful "; while Mrs. Browning was a " soul of fire enclosed in a shell of pearl; nor," he added, was she " more remarkable for genius and learning than for sweetness of temper, tenderness of

heart, depth of feeling, and purity of spirit. . . A union so complete as theirs — in which the mind has nothing to crave nor the heart to sigh for — is cordial to behold and soothing to remember." He confessed (and this was in 1854) that the names of these two poets were even more familiar in America than in England, and that their poetry was probably more read and better understood there than among their own countrymen." This was partially due to their Boston publisher, James T. Fields, who became a personal friend. In November, 1849, he is writing Miss Mitford that he was just then "superintending the republication of the complete *Poems* of Robert Browning, the first American reprint to be issued by their house in a few weeks." Upon hearing this Miss Mitford replied that Mrs. Browning "would be enchanted at this honor done her husband. It is most creditable to America that they think more of our thoughtful poets than the English do themselves." The early recognition the United States had given her own work Miss Mitford never forgot. It led her to say: "It takes ten years to make a literary

reputation in England, but America is wiser and bolder and dares say at once, 'This is fine.' I love America and the Americans," she once enthusiastically exclaimed. Two years after writing of the publication of Robert Browning's *Poems* Mr. Fields is writing Miss Mitford of his intention to republish a new edition of Mrs. Browning; but another house having claimed the right, the project was abandoned. In the "charming" visit he paid them in 1852 he regretted that he could not have seen more of them. But he found Mrs. Browning in better health than he expected and hoped she would live "to write many more great poems." That the visit was mutually enjoyable is seen by Miss Mitford's writing to Mr. Fields that "Mrs. Browning was delighted with your visit."

Among other Americans to the Browning home, who "took coffee" with them once or twice a week, was Mr. Ware, author of *Letters from Palmyra* — "a delightful, earnest, simple person." The different American ministers and their wives who called in passing through the city were welcomed. Among these were Gen-

eral Watson Webb of the Court of Vienna, "with an air of moral as well as military command on his brow and eyes"; Honorable George Marsh of the Court of Constantinople, and the Honorable William B. Kinney, who became a resident of Florence after his mission to Sardinia. His wife Elizabeth C. Kinney (mother of Edmund Clarence Stedman), in Scribner's magazine for December, 1870, gives pleasant reminiscences of their friendship. She tells of spending with the "great Elizabeth, Queen of Poetry, and Robert, the mighty, crowned also in his own peculiar sphere of poesy," a beautiful June day at Pratolino. They went in an open carriage, with a man servant to carry the luncheon. Having eaten this on a rustic table in the grove they all went to the brow of the hill to see the view. The silence which encompassed them was only broken by a remark of Mrs. Browning: "How it speaks to us!"

An ever-precious memory to George William Curtis was a two days' visit he had with the poets to Vallombrosa in 1847, when, as he has told us in his *Easy Chair*, they "sat under the

great trees upon the lawn-like hillsides near the convent, or in the seats in the dusky convent chapel, while Robert Browning, at the organ, chased a fugue of Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, or dreamed out upon twilight keys a faint, throbbing toccata of Galuppi." As one of the thousand young Americans who had read with eager enthusiasm Mrs. Browning's recently published *Poems,* which, he confessed, had a " more general and hearty welcome in the United States than any English poet since the time of Byron and Company," he had met them at their own tea table a few days before. This was the first year of their married life. As he gave her Margaret Fuller's *Essay* in the New York *Tribune* he noted how " deeply and most intelligently " she regarded America and the Americans, feeling a " kind of enthusiastic gratitude to them for their generous fondness of her poetry." In all her conversation, " so mild and tender and womanly, so true and intense and rich with rare learning," he perceived a " girl-like simplicity and sensitiveness, and a womanly earnestness that took the heart captive."

George Ticknor and Mr. Palfrey, as guests at the Moncton Milnes breakfast, added another link to the chain connecting the Brownings to the United States. Later, when in Florence, Mrs. Browning refers to " tête-a-têtes " with Theodore Parker, who had been " making a little Christmas book for the young to prove how they should keep Christmas without a Christ." Upon his death she wrote Miss Haworth that she felt " very sorry. There was something high and noble about the man, though he was not deep in proportion." When Mr. Parker first met the Brownings in Rome he wrote an American friend that he " liked her much. He too seems a good fellow, full of life." They both seemed to him " intense Italians." A few weeks later (January, 1860), he wrote of meeting them again, " very pleasant people they are, too. I rejoice in them."

Browning's fullness of life was what impressed Phillips Brooks when he met him in England in later years (1865-66) ; " one of the nicest people to pass an evening with," he wrote, " cordial and hearty as a dear old uncle, shakes your hand as

if he were really glad to see you." He seemed to him "very like some of the best of Thackeray's London men." He even called him "a full-souled American." As to his talk, he said it "wasn't Sordello and it wasn't as fine as Paracelsus, but nobody ever talked more nobly, truly, and cheerily than he." It was a fine compliment he paid him, when he declared he went home and slept, after hearing him, as one does "after a fresh starlight walk with a good, cool breeze on his face."

Upon the death of Browning in 1889, he represented the heart of the American students when he wrote his brother Arthur, "We will mingle our tears in memory of Browning and Lightfoot." Fittingly his heartfelt prayer closed the beautiful Browning memorial service which followed in King's Chapel, Boston.

This fullness of life of Browning, this sympathy with all phases of nature and human nature, doubtless led Henry James to say that he was the "accomplished, saturated, sane, sound man of the London world, and the world of culture, of whom it is impossible not to believe that he had

arrived somehow for his own deep purpose at the enjoyment of a double identity." (Life of Story.)

Some of the most comforting words from the Browning home were sent to friends across the Atlantic. To a Brooklyn lady whose daughter had suddenly died Mrs. Browning wrote: "Hearing of such things makes us silent before God. What must it be to experience them? I have suffered myself very heavy afflictions, but the affliction of the mother I have not suffered, and I shut my eyes to the image of it. Only where Christ brings His cross He brings His presence, and where He is, none are desolate, and there is no room for despair. At the darkest you have felt a hand through the dark, closer perhaps and tenderer than any touch dreamt of at noon. As He knows His own, so He knows how to comfort them — using sometimes the very grief itself, and straining it to the sweetness of a faith unattainable to those ignorant of grief."

This Christian attitude of mind illustrates what Peter Bayne says in his *Essay* on Mrs. Browning: "Mrs. Browning is a Christian poetess not in the sense of appreciating, like Carlyle, the loftiness of

the Christian type of character, not in the sense of adopting, like Goethe, a Christian machinery for artistic self-worship, not even in the sense of preaching, like Wordsworth, an august but abstract morality, but in the sense of finding, like Cowper, the whole hope of humanity bound up in Christ and taking all the children of her mind to him, that He may lay His hand on them and bless them."

From the first of the Italian life, American artists seem to have been especially favored by the Brownings. Hiram Powers, the sculptor, with those "great burning eyes of his," was a chief friend and favorite — a "most charming, simple, straight-forward, genial American." His family, as well as work, claimed personal attention. William Wetmore Story and his wife were also favored friends; "he, the son of Judge Story, and full of all sorts of talent, and she, one of those cultivated and graceful American women who take away the reproach of the national want of refinement." From the first of their meeting, in 1848, courtesies had been extended. Browning, at this time, as Story wrote James Russell

Lowell, had "straight black hair, small eyes, wide apart, which he twitches constantly together, a smooth face, a slightly aquiline nose, and manners nervous and rapid. He has a great vivacity, but not the least humor, some sarcasm, considerable critical faculty, and very great frankness and friendliness of manner and mind." "Mrs. Browning," he continues, sat "buried up in a large easy-chair, listening and talking very quietly and pleasantly, with nothing of that peculiarity which one would expect from reading her poems. Her eyes are small, her mouth large, she wears a cap and long curls. Very unaffected and pleasant and simple-hearted is she, and Browning says, "her poems are the least good part of her." He also writes his poet-friend of reading at his weekly "at home" on Sunday evenings the *Biglow Papers,* when, giving as well as he could "the true Yankee note," which had "convulsed audiences of other evenings," the Brownings were quite as much amused and delighted as he himself. Later he is writing of their "constant and delightful intercourse" at the *Baths of Lucca* (August, 1853), when they interchanged "long

evenings together two or three times a week." "We like them very much," he continues. "They are so simple, unaffected, and sympathetic;" both are "busily engaged in writing, he on a new volume of lyrical poems and she on a tale or novel in verse." He is pleased to tell his old friend that both of them "seemed greatly to have taken to him and M.," adding, "we all join in standing on the ramparts and waving our handkerchiefs for you to return." In this same letter he says: "Browning does not smoke; it is his greatest defect; but he tells me that Tennyson does excessively." (Life of Story.) But if they could not smoke together, they all enjoyed the "close communion of tea-drinking" between the two houses. They spent hours together in the woods. "The whole day in the woods with the Brownings," he wrote. "We went at ten o'clock, carrying our provisions. Browning and I walked to the spot, and then, spreading shawls under the great chestnuts, we read and talked the live-long day, the Lima at our feet bubbling on, clear and brown over the stones, and the distant rock-ribbed peaks taking the changes of the

hours. In the afternoon we took a long walk through the grove, and found wondrous *fungi,* some red as coral." Books are exchanged. Browning lends Milnes's *Life of Keats,* which Mrs. Story reads aloud to her husband as he works in his studio; while Mrs. Story carries to Mrs. Browning her copy of *Jane Eyre,* which Henry James, in telling of the fact, says was "almost certainly that of the American pirated form contained in one of the parcels arriving from Boston 'per Nautilus,' the blessed little New England sailing-ship of the time before tariffs, which coming straight to Leghorn made our friends feel nearer home than anything had yet done."

A loving word is occasionally sent, as when Mrs. Browning writes to Story after referring to some affair, "May you never be wounded again through the objects of your love — the only wounds which *tell* in this life. The rest are scratches."

From *Sienna,* August, 1859, Story writes Charles E. Norton of his continued delight in the Brownings, who were then living a stone's throw

from him. "Every evening we sit on our lawn," he writes, "under the ilexes and cypresses, and take our tea and talk until the moon has made the circuit of the quarter of the sky." After referring to Browning's being "full of life as ever," even in good spirits about Mrs. Browning, although she was "sadly weak and ill," he pictures the little *Pen* as well, and as hearing him, as he writes, laughing and playing with his boys and daughter Edith on the terrace below his window.

This life with the Storys and the "excellent and noble Brownings" Charles Sumner could not forget; for this same year (1859) he is writing them his remembrances of "those delicious Tuscan evenings on your lawn with Browning and the immortal style of Landor." The year before, while ill in England, he had found the Brownings, as well as Mrs. Jameson, "full of kindness" for him. "I like them all very much," he wrote Longfellow. In his first visit to Europe, some twenty years before, he had met Browning, as the author of *Paracelsus,* and Landor as his friend.

In all the loving intercourse of the Storys and

the Brownings, the children were not forgotten. In a chatty letter to Edith Story Browning refers to her brother's work: "Julian's picture at the Grosvenor is admirable in many respects, and above the works on each side of it. Waldo's statuette is exceedingly good also; they have, each of them, enjoyed a better education than is easily obtainable here." He also shows his appreciation of the work she had sent him — a translation of the autobiography of an interesting Tuscan sculptor, Giovanni Dupré. (Life of Story.)

In this beautiful Italian life, the poet helped the artist and the artist the poet. It was after a visit to Story's studio that Browning wrote his *Elegy of Sculpture,* and its advantage over poetry as finding work for uninspired moments. He also studied modeling with the sculptor. In 1861 Mrs. Browning is writing Miss Blagden that Mr. Story is "doing Robert's bust, likely to be a success" (now in the Venetian palace). This was the year he calls Story "the dearest of all American friends," closing one of his letters with "next year, next hundred years will change

nothing in my gratitude and love. Meantime I run in and shake hands, and sit by the fire as of old, see you always and love you always."

In his *Conversations in a Studio,* Mr. Story has precious memories of these friends. He recalls her as "pure and noble a spirit as ever informed this tenement of clay, as rare a genius as ever dwelt within this noble city of Florence." After her death he wrote his friend Norton that she looked "like a young girl — all the outlines rounded and filled up, all traces of disease effaced, and a smile on her face so living that they could not for hours persuade themselves she was really dead." In some lines he then wrote he refers to Browning's loss, with this comfort:

'Round every heart some happy memory clings
Some winds steal music from the slackest strings;
The coldest heart at moments must aspire,
The stormiest sense hath hidden sparks of fire.
. . . . . .
All that we ever did were but as dust
Without these simple words — hope, love, and trust.

Another American visitor to *Casa Guidi* was Mr. Page, "an earnest, simple, noble artist and

man, who carries his Christianity down from his deep heart to the point of his brush." The portrait he painted of Browning in 1854 the poet considered "magnificent," the "finest even of his works"; he wrote Story: "just the head, which he wished to concentrate his art upon in a manner which would have been impossible had the canvass been larger." He considered the "result marvellous," the "wonder of everybody — no such work has been achieved in our time to my knowledge at least. I am not qualified to speak of the likeness, understand, only of the life and effect, which I wish with all my heart had been given to my wife's head, or any I like to look at, than my own."

The presentation of the picture by Mr. Page to Mrs. Browning gave much delight. "Such a princely piece of generosity," wrote Mrs. Browning to Mr. Story, "but there was no withstanding his admirable delicacy and nobleminded-ness, which made the sacrifice of such time and labor even easy."

The year before, Page had painted Charlotte Cushman, which, Story wrote Lowell, was "won-

derfully fine," the "finest portrait I think I ever saw." (Life of Story.) Mrs. Browning heard "wonderful things" of it, even declaring that the Americans called Page the "American Titian." In this same letter she refers to their having met Charlotte Cushman twice — once on a balcony on the boulevard, when together they saw Louis Napoleon enter Paris in immediate face of the empire, and once in Florence. "I like the manly soul in her face and manners," she wrote. "Manly and masculine — an excellent distinction of Mrs. Jameson's." Years before (1845), Mr. Browning, upon meeting the American actress, had called her "clever and truthful — loving."

Christopher Cranch, another American artist who enjoyed the Brownings, corroborates what William W. Story says of him when he first met him in 1849; — that he wore no beard, and that his hair was nearly black. He ever loved to recall his "bright, alert, sunny, cordial presence" as he sat in his studio in Florence, or as he saw him with his poet-wife at *Casa Guidi*. When animated in conversation, he said he had "a way of

getting up and standing, or walking up and down, while still continuing to talk in a fluent vein." His manners were "extremely cordial and friendly."

The Brownings' interest in Margaret Fuller is another link to the United States. Aside from her having been a reviewer of their poems, Mrs. Browning had especially noted her work in Rome during the siege. So, as "a devoted friend of the republicans, and a meritorious attendant on the hospitals," she welcomed her when with her husband and child she came to Florence. She found the Marquis "amiable and gentlemanly," but having "no pretension to cope with his wife on any ground appertaining to the intellect." "She talks and he listens." She declared she always wondered at that species of marriage; but "people are so different in their matrimonial ideals that it may answer sometimes."

When in London Margaret was told that Browning had just married Miss Barrett and gone to Italy. Her hope then that she might meet them there was now fulfilled. "I see the Brownings often," she wrote home, "and love

30339

and admire them both more and more as I know them better. Mr. Browning enriches every hour I pass with him, and is a most cordial, true, and noble man."

Margaret Fuller had literary credentials to these great poets' attention; for, as she wrote her friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, her two volumes of *Miscellanies* had been "courteously greeted in the London journals, and her *Essays on American Literature* had been translated and published in *La Revue Independante*." And she was appreciated by them. Mrs. Browning, in writing to Miss Mitford in April, 1850, of Margaret's intention to sail for home, says they shall be sorry to lose her. She calls her "a very interesting person, far better than her writings — thoughtful, spiritual in her habitual mode of mind; not only exalted, but *exaltée* in her opinions, and yet calm in manner." Several months later, after mentioning that they spent with them their last evening in Italy, she wrote this same friend: "Deep called unto deep indeed. Now she is where there is no more grief and no more sea; and none of the restless in the world, none of the

shipwrecked in heart ever seemed to me to want peace more than she did. We saw much of her last winter, and over a great gulf of differing opinion we both felt drawn strongly to her. High and pure aspiration she had — yes, and a tender woman's heart — and we honored the truth and courage in her, rare in woman or man." She believed that the work she was preparing in Italy would have been more equal to her faculty than anything she had previously written, her other writings seeming to her inferior to the impressions her conversation gave. She seemed to her to be chiefly known to America " by oral lectures, and a connection with the newspaper press, neither of them happy means of publicity." She then refers to the parting gift — " a Bible from her child to ours, ' In memory of Angelo Eugene Ossoli ' (a strange prophetic expression) " and declares Margaret herself was " full of a sad presentment."

Mrs. Browning herself was thoughtful in gifts to those she loved. Once upon returning to Florence she brought to a young friend not only one of her new books and some photographs, but

a pair of Roman gold sleeve buttons. And this young friend was another American whom the Brownings honored — none other than Kate Field. Writing to her from Rome in 1860 Mrs. Browning refers to her as "learning Latin and communing with Walter Savage Landor," who felt, as they all did, that she was "clever, dear, and good," and "the more they had of her the better." We all know that one of the best tributes paid Mrs. Browning after her death was that of this young woman, contributed to an American magazine, the *Atlantic Monthly* of September, 1861. Mr. Browning showed his appreciation in presenting to her in remembrance of his wife a pet locket — a crystal center in which was shaped her hair in two hearts, the surrounding gold being a serpent emblem of eternity. This became another link to the country over the sea by becoming on the death of Miss Field the possession of another American, her biographer, Miss Lilian Whiting.

But perhaps the greatest favorite among the young Americans whom the Brownings honored was the sculptor, Harriet Hosmer; indeed, as

Kate Field wrote from Rome in 1859, she was "a universal favorite, praised by everyone there." Some five years before, Mrs. Browning had written Miss Mitford of the young American sculptor being "a great pet of mine and Robert's." She "emancipates the eccentric life of a perfectly emancipated female from all shadow of blame by the purity of hers. She lives here all alone (at twenty-two), dines and breakfasts at the cafés precisely as a young man would, works from six o'clock in the morning till night as a great artist must, and this with an absence of pretension and simplicity of manners which accord rather with the childish dimples in her rosy cheeks than with her broad forehead and high aims." Several weeks later, upon her return to Florence, Mrs. Browning again refers to her as "an immense favorite with us both." When about to buy a pony for little Robert, however, they decided to hunt up someone else than "Hatty Hosmer," to ride with him, "because she had been thrown thirty times!" not "on account of bad riding, be it observed, but of daring and venturesome riding." At about this time Mr. Story, in writ-

ing Lowell of his Italian life, speaks of her, with Charlotte Cushman, Grace Greenwood, and others, as one of the "emancipated females who dwell there in heavenly unity." "Hatty," he writes, "takes a high hand here with Rome, and would have the Romans know that a Yankee girl can do anything she pleases, walk alone, ride her horse alone, and laugh at their rules." (Life of Story.) At another time Mrs. Browning refers to her as bringing to them a most charming design for a fountain for Lady Marion Alford, adding, "the imagination is unfolding its wings in Hatty." Having met Lady Alford in Rome the year before she had found her "very eager about literature and art and Robert," for all which reasons she declares she should care for her. "Hatty calls her divine." She then tells of the lady kneeling before Hatty and placing on her finger, as a present, the "most splendid ring you can imagine, a ruby in the form of a heart, surrounded and crowned with diamonds. Hatty is frankly delighted and says so with all sorts of fantastical exaggerations." And who that has ever known Harriet Hosmer, the irrepressible,

can fail to recall her charming reminiscences of this friendship? I can never forget the satisfied joy she revealed when showing me the breastpin these blest friends gave her; or when telling of her visits in their home; or of seeing Salvini as Othello in the same theater-box with them; or of having the runaway donkey-ride in a Caretta with Robert Browning, supplemented by picnic pleasures with them both and other gifted ones. One of these excursions has a special interest for us as the result of America's appreciation of Robert Browning; for, upon receiving a check from Messrs. Ticknor and Fields, his Boston publishers, the poet came to her studio in high glee with the assertion that it was to be spent on a picnic excursion to Albano, with her and Frederic Leighton (afterwards President of the Royal Academy) as guests. This was all the more to be enjoyed he said, because it was the publishers, "own buona grazia" they were not in the least obliged to give. "But this is the way they always do things," gratefully exclaimed the poet, "invariably leaving us their debtors."

It was to this young American, this same

"Hatty Hosmer," that Mrs. Browning finally consented to sit for the now famous *Clasped Hands,* which symbolize, as Hawthorne says in his *Marble Fawn,* "the individuality and heroic union of two high poetic lives." Only "Hatty" shall cast them, "I will not sit to the Formatore," she declared. (Private letter of Miss Hosmer.)

Another link of the Brownings to the United States, which, however, Mrs. Browning did not live to see, was the marriage of their son to an American woman. Thus an American came to be the presiding mistress over the loved books and treasures as gathered in the home of Robert Barrett Browning, the *Rezzonico* Palace in Venice; and to her came a share in the ministry of the last days of the poet-husband. "His death," she wrote Mrs. Bloomfield-Moore (to whom he had written some of his last letters) "was a fitting close in every respect to such a noble life. . . . He had been so full of life, and was so happy in our new home, that when his illness came it was like a thunderbolt out of a clear sky." After saying that he was glad his illness had happened in Venice and not in Lon-

don she said he was "touchingly grateful" for all that they had tried to do for his recovery. "God knows it was our best," she added. "But his time to go had come; and we all feel grateful that it came as it did, that his falling asleep was so peaceful." Referring to the ceremony at Westminster Abbey she declared it was "beyond words impressive, and as one would have desired it to be in every way. *Pen* was immensely touched by the fitting music to his mother's beautiful words."

To another American, William Wetmore Story, of all the many friends, was given the charge of affairs consequent upon the death of the poet; while of all those who ministered charming hospitality and loving appreciation in the last years two American ladies, Mrs. Arthur Bronson and Mrs. Bloomfield-Moore, must take the lead. Mrs. Bronson, in the *Century* magazine (1900 and 1902) has pictured their life at Asolo and Venice, and the poet has ever associated her with his last book *Asolando*. It was when the Storys were visiting at the Asolo home of this "supremely amiable countrywoman," as James calls her, that

Browning, not long before his death, "so well and in such force, brilliant and delightful as ever," said, as he stood by the gate after a most tender farewell: "We have been friends for over forty years without a break." Upon hearing of his death the poet-sculptor "spent the evening in tears and in talks about him and the old time." All he could do at the funeral, he wrote Mr. Norton, was to lay on the coffin two wreaths, "one of those exquisite white Florence roses, and the other of laurel. She is a great loss to literature," he added, "to Italy and to the world — the greatest poet among women."

It is to an American, Mrs. Bloomfield-Moore, through the gift in 1882 to the New York *Metropolitan Museum of Art* of a large painting, *The Meuse from Bouvigne,* and to the *Boston Art Museum* of another called *Solitude,* that America perpetuates the work of the artist-son. It finally remained for an American genius, Mrs. H. H. A. Beach, to give some of the best musical settings to his poems, and an American poet, Richard Watson Gilder, to write one of the most original poems upon his death:

THE TWELFTH OF DECEMBER, 1889.

On this day Browning died?
Say rather: On the tide
That throbs against those glorious palace walls;
That rises — pauses — falls
With melody and myriad-tinted gleams;
On that enchanted tide
Half-real, and half-poured from lovely dreams,
A soul of Beauty — a white, rhythmic flame —
Passed singing forth into the Eternal Beauty whence it came.

It was also an American, Professor Hiram Corson, who organized the first Browning society of any land, the *Browning Society of Cornell University*. This, organized some five years before the London society in University College, London (1881), was the result of a conference between Mr. Corson and Dr. Furnivall, when the American scholar was cordially invited to lecture before the society the following year. The societies that followed in America — the Syracuse,

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NOTE. — Written for and read at the *Browning Memorial*, at King's Chapel, Boston, where was also sung a Browning poem, musically set by a Boston lady, Clara K. Rogers.

Philadelphia, Baltimore, and others — originated more or less from Professor Corson's lectures and readings.

It remained at last for the Boston Browning Society to give in Boston, for the first time on any stage, in March, 1902, the tragedy of *The Return of the Druses*. A few years before, 1899, it had given the first stage representation of *Pippa Passes*, in six scenes, with music written for the occasion.

While the work of the poet-husband is thus being perpetuated in the United States, the gifted wife is not forgotten. The unique, beautiful Browning room in Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., with its Browning windows, its Browning autographs, and Story bust, is a perpetual reminder of the love of young women. New editions of her work, lovingly edited by well-equipped Americans, are a continual reminder of her who "loved America," and who publicly declared:

> For I am bound by gratitude,
> By love and blood,
> To brothers of mine across the sea,
> Who stretch out kindly hands to me.

I

FOR THE ANNIVERSARY OF MRS. BROWNING'S DEATH, JUNE 29, 1861.

"'Tis beautiful," she faintly cried,
Then closed her weary eyes and died.
So stands plain fact on history's page,
Attested to by friend and sage.
But in our hearts the fact grows bright,
Illumined with immortal light.
For open eyes saw heaven's shores,
And life, not death, revealed its stores.

"'Tis beautiful." It must be so,
If such a soul, 'midst parting's woe,
Could with truth's perfect clearness see
The secret of life's mystery;
Could know that fullest life of man
Needs heaven's light to round God's plan.

O woman-soul, without a peer,
We thank thee more and more each year,
For this sweet proof of beauty's power
Beyond earth's transitory hour.
It calms our hours of doubt and pain,
And beautifies earth's troubled reign,
To feel that thou art sending still
This same sweet message of God's will,
Born of fruition's grander sight,
Of perfect beauty, peace, and light.

II

ROBERT BROWNING.

——a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast.
O thou soul of my soul, I shall clasp thee again,
And with God be the rest!

—*Prospice.*

Fulfilled, December 12, 1889.

Oh, the blessed fruition
Of peace out of pain!
Of a light without darkness,
A clasping again!
Of a full soul's reunion
In Love's endless reign!

Sing, O Earth, with new joy
At this victory won!
For the faith that endured
'Till the setting of sun!
For the hope that shone clear
Through the mighty work done!
For the love that sought God
To guide love here begun!
Sing, O Earth, with new joy
For such victory won!

ELIZABETH PORTER GOULD

INDEX

Page

Abell, Edith..... 66
"Agamemnon La Saissaz and Dramatic Idyls" 44
Alexandria Theological Seminary..... 28
Alford, Lady Marion..... 95
Alma-Tadema 67
Anderson, Mary..... 66
"Anniversary of Mrs. Browning's death" 102
Arcturus..... 13, 18, 22
Art Museum, Boston..... 99
Asolo 98
"Asolando" 42, 98
"Athenæum" 21
"Atlantic Monthly"..... 93
Aurora Leigh..... 26, 27, 28, 55

Bacon, Delia..... 64
Baltimore (Browning Society)..... 101
Bancroft, George..... 43
Barrett, Elizabeth.... 9, 12, 13, 14, 18, 47, 90
Baths of Lucca..... 82
Bayne, Peter..... 80
Beach, Mrs. H. H. A..... 99

Page
Beecher, Henry Ward..... 69
"Bells and Pomegranates"..... 11, 34
"Biglow Papers"..... 82
Blagden, Miss..... 52, 58, 71, 86
"Blithedale Romance"..... 65
"Blot on the Scutcheon"..... 20
Boston, Massachusetts..... 35, 79, 101
Boston Anti-Slavery Bazar..... 49
Boyd, Hugh Stuart..... 15, 17, 19, 24, 26
British Museum..... 39
"Broadway Journal"..... 47
Bronson, Mrs. Arthur..... 42, 71, 98
Bronson, Edith..... 42
Brooks, Phillips..... 28, 78
Browning, Elizabeth Barrett 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 45, 47, 54, 63, 64, 72, 73, 94, 102
Browning, Robert 19, 20, 34, 35, 55, 62, 64, 65, 79, 82, 83, 103
Browning, Robert Barrett..... 94, 97
Browning, Robert Barrett, Mrs..... 97, 98
Browning Memorial Service..... 79, 100
Browning Society, Boston..... 101
Browning Society, Cornell University.... 100
Browning Society, London..... 100
Browning Society Papers..... 55
Browning Windows, Wellesley College... 101
Bryant, William Cullen..... 21
"Bull's Run"..... 55

Page
California 71
Carlyle, Thomas..... 33, 73, 80
Carman, Bliss..... 43, 44
Carter, Robert..... 18
"Casa Guidi," Florence..... 71, 87, 89
"Caterina to Camoens"..... 18
"Century Magazine"..... 43, 98
Channing, William H..... 70
Chicago and Alton Railroad..... 39
Civil War..... 50, 56
Clarke, Helen A..... 38
"Clasped Hands"..... 97
"Conversations in a Studio"..... 87
Conway, Moncure D..... 38, 70
Cooke, George Willis..... 38
Cornell University..... 36
Corson, Hiram..... 36, 100, 101
Cowper, ... 81
"Cowper's Grave"..... 17
Cranch, Christopher P..... 89
Crawford, Thomas..... 57
Curtis, George William..... 76
Cushman, Charlotte..... 88, 89, 95

"Democratic Review"..... 13, 16
"Dial" (Boston)..... 34
Dickens, Charles..... 22, 45
"Drama of Exile"..... 9, 24, 26

Page

"Dred" 27
Duchess of Argyle..... 61
Dupré, Giovanni..... 86
Duyckinck, Evert A..... 13

"Easy Chair"..... 76
Emerson, Ralph Waldo..... 33, 38, 69, 91
"English Notes"..... 64
"Epilogue of Dramatic Idyls"..... 42
"Essay on Carlyle"..... 33
"Essay on Mind"..... 9, 13, 70
"Essays on American Literature"..... 91
"Evening Mirror"..... 13, 46, 47

Field, Kate..... 93, 94
Fields, James T..... 65, 69, 73, 74, 75
Fordham Cottage..... 12
Fuller, Margaret..... 24, 34, 64, 77, 90, 91
Furnivall, Dr..... 100

Garnett, Richard..... 38
Gilder, Richard Watson..... 99, 100
Goethe 81
Gould, E. P..... 102, 103
"Graham's Magazine"..... 13, 16, 18, 21
"Greek Slave" (Powers)..... 56
Greenwood, Grace..... 95
"Grief" (Sonnet)..... 18

Page

Harrison's *Life of Poe*..... 13
Harvard College..... 28
Haworth, Miss..... 30, 52, 59, 78
Hawthorne, Nathaniel..... 25, 61, 64, 65, 97
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, Mrs..... 61, 62
Hawthorne, Rose..... 63, 69
Hawthorne, Una..... 62, 69
Hemans, Mrs..... 16, 20
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth..... 38
Hillhouse, James..... 46
Hillard, George S..... 72, 73
Horne, Richard H..... 11, 21
Hosmer, Harriet..... 93, 94, 95, 97
Howe, Julia Ward..... 47, 48
Howells, William D..... 38
Hoxie, E. C..... 27, 40

"International Copyright"..... 22, 23
Ipsen's "Portuguese Sonnets" in Browning Palace, Venice..... 39
Irving, Washington..... 9, 22, 23
"Italian Lyrics"..... 31
"Italy and America"..... 52
Italy..... 51, 90, 91

Jameson, Anna (Mrs.).. 31, 49, 50, 60, 72 73, 85, 89
James, Henry..... 79

Page

Jane Eyre..... 84

Keats..... 47, 84
Kensal Green Cemetery..... 70
Kenyon, John..... 11, 54, 73
King's Chapel, Boston..... 79, 100
Kinney, Elizabeth C..... 76
Kinney, Hon. W. B..... 76

"La Revue Independente"..... 91
Landor, Walter Savage..... 73, 85, 93
"L. E. L."..... 16
Leighton, Frederick (Sir)..... 96
Letter of Mrs. Browning, first time published 63
"Letters from Palmyra"..... 75
Lightfoot, Mr..... 79
Lincoln's "Inaugural Address"..... 51
"Little Nell"..... 22
Longfellow, Henry W..... 42, 85
"Loved Once"..... 18
Lowell, James Russell.. 18, 19, 45, 57, 69, 81, 82, 88, 95
"Luria" 36

Marsh, Hon. George..... 76
Martin, Mrs..... 24, 25, 45, 50
Mathews, Cornelius..... 13, 20, 21, 23

Page
"Men and Women" 29, 40
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City 99
Miller, Joaquin 71
Milnes, Moncton 64, 78
Milton 17
Mitford, Miss .. 24, 47, 49, 54, 58, 59, 69, 71, 74, 91, 94
Montaüto Villa 61
Moore, Mrs. Bloomfield 43, 97, 98, 99
Motley's "American Crisis" 54
Moulton, Mrs. Louise Chandler 38
Motherwell 46

Napoleon 32
Napoleonic Poems 31
"Nautilus" 84
New York *Independent* 31, 32, 52
New York *Tribune* 17, 34, 77
Niagara Falls 70
"North American Review" 13, 16, 34
Norton, Charles Eliot 58, 84, 87, 99
Norton, Mrs 16, 20

"Official Guide" 39
"Orion" 21
Osgood, Frances S 12
Ossoli, Angelo Eugene 92

Page

Ossoli, Marquis..... 90

Page, Mr..... 87, 88, 89
Paine's "Age of Reason" and "Rights of Man" 9
"Pain in Pleasure"..... 18
Palfrey, Mrs..... 78
"Paracelsus" 11, 34, 79
"Paradise Lost"..... 36, 37
Parker, Theodore..... 78
"Parleyings with certain people"..... 44
"Passion Flowers" (Howe)..... 47
"Pauline: a fragment of a Confession".. 36
Peabody, Elizabeth P..... 61
"Pen" 85, 98
Philadelphia (Browning Society)..... 101
Pierce, General Franklin..... 49
"Pippa Passes"..... 66, 101
"Plays and Poems"..... 34
Poe, Edgar Allan..... 9, 12, 25, 46
"Poems of Congress"..... 30, 31
"Politian" 46
Porter, Charlotte..... 38
Powers, Hiram..... 56, 81
Pratolino, Italy..... 76
"Prometheus Bound"..... 13
The Proctors..... 73

Page
Rabbi Ben Ezra..... 66
Railway Time Table..... 39
"Rapping Spirits"..... 58
"Raven" (Poe)..... 9, 10, 11, 46
Requests for autographs..... 71
Rezzonico Palace, Venice..... 86, 97
"Rhapsody of Life's Progress"..... 20
"Rhyme of the Duchess May"..... 25
Richmond, Virginia..... 57
Rogers, Clara K..... 100

Salvini, Tommaso 96
Sarianna Browning..... 34
"Septimius" 69
"Seraph and Poet"..... 18
Shelley 47
Shillaber, B. P. (Mrs. Partington)..... 44
Sigourney, Mrs..... 19, 46
"Six Months in Italy"..... 73
"Solitude" (painting of Robert Barrett Browning) 99
"Sonnets from the Portuguese"..... 29, 39
Stedman, Edmund Clarence.. 17, 30, 37, 41, 55
Stoddards, The 27, 69
Story, William Wetmore.. 55, 64, 81, 86, 87, 89, 94, 98
Story, Edith..... 86
Story, Julian..... 86

Page
Stowe, Harriet Beecher..... 57, 60, 61
Sturgis, Russell..... 70
"Summing up" (*Independent*)..... 32
Sumner, Charles 85
"Superstition" (Sonnet)..... 18
Syracuse Browning Society..... 100

"Tamerlane" 36
Taylor, Bayard 27, 57, 67, 69
Tennyson, Alfred 46, 47, 83
Thaxter, Celia 27, 40, 41
Thaxter, Levi Lincoln 27, 40, 42
"The Case of M. Valdemar"..... 11
"The Child and the Watcher"..... 18
"The Cry of the Human"..... 17
"The Knickerbocker"..... 23
"The Lady's Yes"..... 18
"The Liberty Bell"..... 49
"The Maiden's Death" 18
"The Meuse from Bouvigne" (picture).. 99
"The Pathfinder" 20
"The Pioneer" 18
"The Return of the Druses"..... 101
"The Ring and the Book"..... 36
"The Rubaiyat" 39
"The Runaway Slave" 48
"The Seraphim" 13, 15, 16
"The Sleep" 17
"The Soul's Expression" 18

Page

"The Union" (newspaper) 17
"The Union Flag" 17
Thompson, John R., ... 13
Ticknor and Fields, ... 96
Ticknor, George 78
Torrey, Bradford 42
Tuckerman, Henry T..... 19
Turner, Ross 39

"Uncle Tom's Cabin"..... 59
University College, London..... 100

Vallombrosa 76
Venice, ... 97, 98
Victorian Poets, Stedman 17
Virginia Poe 12

Ware, Henry 75
Webb, General Watson 76
Webster, Daniel 22
Wellesley College (Browning room)..... 101
Westland, Mr. 26
Westminster Abbey 98
White, Andrew D..... 67, 68
Whiting, Lilian 93
Willis, Nathaniel P..... 46
Woodberry, George E. 38
Wordsworth 81
"Work" (Sonnet) 18
"Work and Contemplation" (Sonnet).... 18

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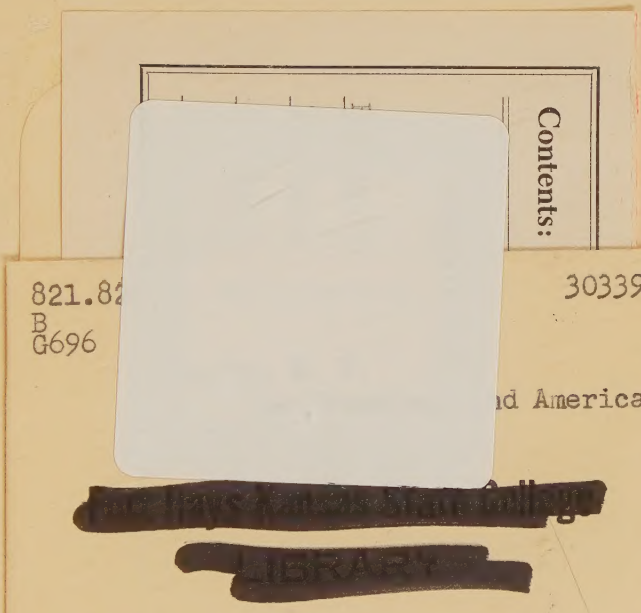

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